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ABSTRACT

The variables that distinguish between deans characterized by colleagues and superiors as "most influential" and deans who were "least influential" among colleagues were studied. The sample of deans managed academic units in five public universities in the west, all meeting the Carnegie classification of "Research I" universities. Agendas and minutes from meetings of the deans' council over the previous year revealed the issues deans dealt with and how they were handled. Other questions focused on contacts and unit resources. The Influence Style Questionnare was used to evaluate behavior expected in a situation where lateral and upward influence attempts occur. Four influence styles were assessed that involve reward and punishment, participation and trust, common vision, and assertive persuasion. Three deans at each university were rated by colleagues and superiors as most or least influential, using a paired-comparison technique. Colleagues and superiors were most influenced by the deans' behavior and their resources. The most influential deans had more contact with both colleagues and superiors. There were differences between the most and least influential deans in the use of reward and punishment and in assertive persuasion styles. (SW)

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THE INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC DEANS ON COLLEAGUES AND SUPERIORS

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THE INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC DEANS ON COLLEAGUES AND SUPERIORS

From the perspective of a faculty member, the complexity of higher education institutiions as organizations poses a dilemma: how can a person whose professiional goals are to carry out the relatively independent work of teaching and scholarly or empirical research maintain any sense of security in an organization that is increasingly political and bureaucratic? The dependent relationship leads faculty members to ask to whom they can appeal for succor and support in scholarship. Within the organizational hierarchy, the logical choice is the department head or, better yet, the dean of the school. Deans are seen as people who make the decisions that eventually affect what courses faculty will teach and in what research efforts they will have support. Yet deans may seem quite inaccessible to faculty members, which fosters a nagging insecurity about the information base on which university-wide decisions are made. Moreover, even if the dean did understand and support a given program or research effort, can she "protect" those efforts when budget cuts are made? What influence can she exercise among her colleagues and with the provost and president on the faculty's behalf?

Answers to these questions can be approached by examining the results of a study of the variables that distinguish between deans characterized by colleagues and superiors as "most influential" and deans who were "least influential" among colleagues.

Influence as a Concept

"Influence" in this study refers to a process of producing behavior change (so defined by Porter, Allen, and Angle, 1981, p. 123) that is more elusive to exercise than is power or authority because, contends Pfeffer (1981, p. 5), it can be resisted without costs. Despite the absence of a power or authority relationship, influential people are regarded as having important opinions. Their advice and support are sought, their preferences known and respected. Because the outcome of influence attempts depends on the choices made by the recipient of influence, influence seems to describe the likely basis for interactions among academic colleagues and upward to superiors whose assent and cooperation are required to get what one wants.

Sources of Influence

The potential sources in the study are influence style, contacts with colleagues and superiors, and unit resources.

Influence Style

Influence style is a measure of behavior patterns in individuals. Because people generally behave in ways that bring about the results they want, feedback from the environment is important to future behavior.

The work of Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold (1972) supports the impact of successful behavior on future behavior choices. Self-confidence, which they define as a "generalized expectancy of success," increases the incidence of influence attempts (p. 298), even though some of those attempts are not successful. Evidence of successful use of persuasion within groups is provided by Marsden (1981), who reported that influential people's preferences tend to pull the others' viewpoints toward their own, creating an apparent consensus (p. 1211). Over time social influence structures develop within a group which, according to Cartwright (1959), clarify not only which acts are influential, but which members can perform those acts.

Contact

As some of the advisory literature about deans suggests, maintaining a broad range of contacts and being able to communicate with a variety of people is an advantage (Roaden, 1970; Baldridge, 1971; Skotheim, 1981). Their advice is supported by the social influence literature, in which one can see links between influence, status, and frequency and centrality of communication.

Tedeschi et al. (1972) showed that centrally located people made more influence attempts with more people (p. 329). They further concluded that centrally located people not only had acquired higher status (p. 330), but their more frequent influence attempts were more successful than the attempts of their lower-status counterparts (p. 304). In research on groups, King (1975) found a pattern of increased

influence among people who made more influence attempts and increased compliance among people who continued to have contact with the person exercising influence. Similarly, Mulder and Wilke (1970, cited in Verhagen, 1978) found higher participation with members of a group enables those with expert power to increase their influence over others (p. 157). Therefore, opportunity to exercise influence seems to be a key variable in the development of influence.

Unit Resources

An alternative explanation for a dean's influence may be the power of the unit the dean heads. Salancik and Pfeffer's (1974) work on the relationship between resource allocation and departmental factors like grant and contract money, faculty F.T.E., and proportion of graduate student credit hours suggests these may be indicators of school-level power as well. Stewart's (1976) research on federal funding and influence showed an imbalance of sciences over humanities when the hard sciences were funded at a higher level. That increase in funding extended to greater influence in governance for departments with more money (p. 10). Since having control of valued resources places one in a position of strength in negotiating compromises, those three factors may distinguish between the two sets of deans.

Sample

The deans in this study administer academic units in five public universities in the west, all classified as "Research I" universities by the Carnegie Council on Policy

Studies in Higher Education (1976). Each is prominent in its state's system of higher education and dependent on the state's economy. They are similar in program mix among academic units and professional schools, in number of deans, and in enrollment (ranging from 17,000 to 33,000 students).

All the universities have experienced the effects of reduced or static resources at the state level. The resulting problem in resource allocation is important to this study because difficulties in supporting all current programs with reduced resources can be expected to heighten conflict and reveal more clearly those who have influence.

Participants included all academic deans at each site except deans of schools of medicine, dentistry, and nursing. The deans within each university were treated as being equal in their access to decisionmaking at the university level. Additional participants were two administrators at each university who held positions above the deans. That respondent group included all the provosts, three of the presidents, and two other top administrators with authority over the deans.

Data Collection Techniques

The three techniques for data collection were document review, interview, and questionnaire. The review of agendas and minutes from meetings of the deans' council over the previous year revealed the issues deans dealt with and how they were handled. Other questions focused on contacts and unit resources.

Investigating the potential sources of influence depended on knowing which three deans at each university were considered by their colleagues and superiors to be the most influential and which three were considered least influential. To establish those two groups through a paired-comparison technique, all participants were asked to respond to a list of pairs of deans by marking the dean in each pair who was the more influential of the two. Data on the deans in each category were then pooled across the sites.

The Influence Style Questionnaire, developed by Roger Harrison and David Berlew from behavior categorized into four influence styles, provides a non-evaluative description of behavior one could expect to see in a situation where lateral and upward influence attempts occur. The four styles and examples of behavior in each are as follows:

Reward and Punishment -- bargaining, invoking power, making demands, making value judgments, setting standards, giving or promising rewards, withholding rewards, giving or threatening punishment, withholding punishments.

Participation and Trust -- admitting mistakes, expressing understanding, sharing responsibility, giving credit for others' ideas.

Common Vision -- appealing to values and emotions, communicating enthusiasm, building group cohesion.

Assertive Persuasion -- taking initiative to propose ideas, giving reasons and facts to support a position.

The respondents rated the observed frequency of specific behavior items for each of the six deans selected at each site through the paired-comparison technique. Target deans did not rate themselves.

Results and Discussion

Influence Style

The behavior of the most influential deans does differ from that of the least influential. The expectation was that the most influential deans would show less coercive behavior (called Reward and Punishment in Harrison and Berlew's scheme) and more persuasive (Assertive Persuasion) behavior than would the least influential deans. However, the findings indicate more frequency of both Reward and Punishment and Assertive Persuasion behavior among the most influential deans.

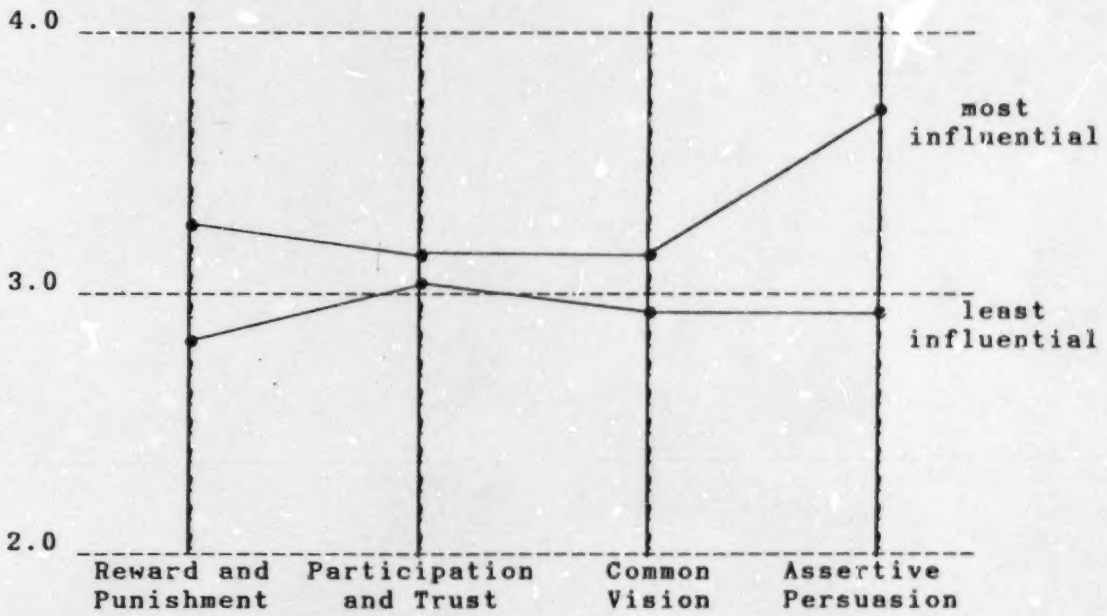

Figure 1. Influence Style Questionnaire Results (means)

As is apparent from the profile of group means in Figure 1, the two groups are clearly distinct in their influence style profiles, with the least influential deans as a group showing less frequency in all the types of behavior measured by the Influence Style Questionnaire. No statistical difference exists between the two groups in Participation and Trust or Common Vision behavior, but t -tests on Reward and Punishment and on Assertive Persuasion behavior are significant at $p < .005$ and $p < .0005$ respectively, for one-tailed tests.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges on the Influence Style Questionnaire for Most and Least Influential Deans (Possible Range is 1 to 5)

	Reward and Punishment	Participation and Trust	Common Vision	Assertive Persuasion
Means:				
Most	3.33	3.25	3.25	3.76
Least	2.80	3.14	2.97	2.93
Standard Deviations:				
Most	.40	.39	.51	.38
Least	.44	.32	.54	.74
Ranges:				
Most	2.7 to 4.0	2.3 to 3.9	2.5 to 4.0	3.4 to 4.5
Least	2.1 to 3.6	2.6 to 3.8	2.0 to 4.0	2.1 to 3.8
T-test between most and least influential deans for each style is	3.46*	.161	.28	3.90**

* $p < .005$
** $p < .0005$

The group means in Figure 1 clearly show the influence advantage goes to deans who more frequently exhibit all four styles of influence. Moreover, assertive persuading and, to a lesser extent, rewarding, punishing, setting standards, and bargaining dominate the profile of the most influential deans.

Contacts

When asked to say how many times in a typical two weeks in the fall they had contact with another dean, the most influential deans claimed more contacts over a broader range than did the least influential deans. Using a month as the time frame, the most influential deans averaged 17.5 contacts in person, on the telephone, or through memos (see Table 2). Because one dean cited 62 contacts, and three others cited 40, the standard deviation (18.6) is large. The least influential deans claimed an average of 6.0 contacts per month, with a range from 17 down to 0 and a standard deviation of 5.3. The *t* -test shows the difference between the two group means to be significant at $p < .025$ for a one-tailed test.

Table 2

Contact Individually With Other Deans per Month (means)

	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation
Most influential	17.5	0 to 62	18.6
Least influential	6.0	0 to 17	5.3

T-test between most and least is 2.3, with 15 *df*
Significant at $p < .025$ (one-tailed).

Clearly, contact with one's colleagues contributes a great deal to having influence with them. This finding is supported by Tedeschi, et al. (1972) in their research on communication centrality and by Mulder and Wilke's (1970, cited in Verhagen, 1978) research on increasing influence through greater participation in a group.

When central administrators were asked the same question about their typical contact with each of the deans, the results bore out the deans' self-reports on contacts with their colleagues (see Table 3). Among presidents and provosts the mean of contacts per month with most influential deans is 5.8, with a standard deviation of 3.03. For the least influential deans the presidents and provosts reported only 3.8 contacts per month, with a standard deviation of 2.98. The t -test supports a finding of a significant difference at $p < .05$ for a one-tailed test.

Table 3

Central Administrators' Individual Contact With Deans per Month (means)

	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation
Most influential	5.8	1.25 to 12.0	3.03
Least influential	3.8	.70 to 10.5	2.98

T-test between most and least influential is 1.83 with 15 df
Significant at $p < .05$ (one-tailed).

Some administrators cautioned that a high rate of contact with some deans was necessary because those deans were new,

were having difficulty making decisions, or needed assistance for other reasons. Given those cautions, the higher rate of contact with the most influential deans may appear conservative if one assumes these deans do not need close supervision from superiors. Instead, for these deans a high contact rate may result from their work on special projects in their schools and with other deans, projects that transcend their usual authority as a unit head. Some are working at the request of the president or provost on projects of importance to the entire university and therefore confer with those superiors more often than do some of their colleagues.

Unit Resources

Both external funds and faculty F.T.E. showed a significant difference between most and least influential deans. Standardizing the data across sites necessitated locating the median of the scores for the percentage of external funds in individual units at each university. In the resulting categories of above the median and below the median, the results were pooled across the universities and the data analyzed using chi-square (displayed in Table 4).

Compared to the least influential deans, twice as many of the most influential deans head units in which the proportion of their budgets derived from external sources is above the median at their university. The chi-square of 4.0 with one degree of freedom is significant at $p < .05$, which supports Salancik and Pfeffer's research on unit power in university budgets. The ability to draw external funding is somehow tied to influence with one's colleagues.

The data on F.T.E. reveal more dramatic differences between the two groups of deans. The most influential deans are nearly three times as likely to head units with more than the median number of F.T.E. The chi-square of 3.5 with one degree of freedom is significant at $p < .02$. Using the median instead of the mean for these data is intended to adjust for the imbalance among units that occurs when one or two units at a university are quite large (often the only ones above the mean). This imbalance is, however, an important feature of influence. Because these units tend to be at the heart of the mission of the university, the faculty in the large units often interact a great deal with other units' faculty. The deans' involvement with large units parallels the faculty's. In several cases, a dean mentioned the impact on the entire university of a single unit because of its size. Occasionally, where decisions have been discussed at the Council of Deans, the effect of alternatives on the larger schools has been a key consideration.

Table 4

Unit Resources

A. Proportion of Budget Derived from External Funds in Relation to the Median for that University

	Above Median	Below Median	Total
Most influential	12	3	15
Least influential	6	9	15
	18	12	30

Chi-square is 4.0 with 1 df
Significant at $p < .05$

B. Number of F.T.E. in Relation to the Median for that University

	Above Median	Below Median	Total
Most influential	11	4	15
Least influential	4	11	15
	15	15	30

Chi-square is 6.5 with 1 df
Significant at $p < .02$.

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

What distinguishes the deans in their influence on colleagues and superiors is their behavior and their

resources. The Influence Style profiles of the most influential deans show more frequent behavior in all four styles, but a marked difference between the two groups in the frequency of the Reward and Punishment and the Assertive Persuasion styles. The most influential deans also had more contact of all types with both colleagues and superiors, which gives them more opportunities to exercise influence.

The findings on resources available to a school or college showed the most influential deans had the advantage. More units with the greater number of faculty F.T.E. at the university were headed by the most influential deans. That group also had a higher proportion of their budgets coming from external funding sources.

Conclusions

Given their influence patterns within the university as an organization, deans are squeezed in the middle between opportunitites for university-wide decisionmaking influence and faculty expectations for succor and support from the dean. Faculty members in a relatively small school have some hope of frequent interchange with the dean, perhaps even encouragement in a research project or in re-developing a course. However, a dean who is that available to faculty may not have the influence at the upper levels of the organization to protect their research projects or the entire program when budget-cutting decisions are made. Much depends on her persuasiveness about the centrality of a given program to the mission of the institution, to the pre-requisites serving

other disciplines, or to the strength of demand from external constituencies for that program or research focus.

On the other hand, faculty whose deans ARE influential may be reasonably well protected, but feel neglected or unable to interact with the dean on a colleaguial level because the dean is so inaccessible. Therefore, the future of faculty status relative to the leadership in their own schools may continue to be more distant and harder to tap unless faculty members learn to use the system to their advantage as well.

Although the focus of this research was lateral influence among deans, the continuing cultural bias in higher educatiion toward the colleaguial model offers a base to guide faculty behavior with their own deans. Faculty may be well advised to initiate contacts and make proposals on ways to improve the efficiency or effectiveness (i.e., "drawing power") of the program. Another option is to take to the dean the kernels of projects that might draw grant money from previously identified sources and ask for feedback on the validity of the project. Going further to ask for help in making the contacts that will increase your chances of getting the project funded enables the dean to publicly use her contacts and increase her own influence while helping a faculty member . Moreover, the additional resources will benefit the entire school, may improve the university's image -- depending on the constituency served -- as well as giving the faculty member a chance to make the dean look good.

Faculty, too, can exercise influence. Taking that posture is a far more effective means of maintaining or

enhancing one's scholarly status than ignoring the organizational dynamics on the assumption those do not affect the faculty or their work. Such a large scale change in faculty behavior would surely lend a different shape to the academy.

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